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ABSTRACT

The "practical" approach currently emphasized in teacher education is critically appraised and contrasted with a more "intellectual" approach. It is suggested that more emphasis on intellectual activities is needed in teacher education and a number of arguments are presented to support a change in that direction. It is suggested that the quality of teaching is likely to improve as a result of such a change in emphasis. (Authors)

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WHO IS AFRAID OF INTELLECTUALISM?

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WHO IS AFRAID OF INTELLECTUALISM?

The first 1977 issue of the Journal of Teacher Education was devoted to alternatives in teacher education. The contents of this issue well represent the current trends in teacher education: emphasis on field experience and teaching practical, directly applicable skills and a clear deemphasis of intellectual activities. In an article in the same issue for example, Nash, Shiman, and Conrad, (1) come close to apologizing for the often-intellectual orientation that Foundation classes take, contrary to this emphasis on skill-training. Nash et al. warned instructors of Foundation classes that they may intellectualize themselves out of existence if they do not change their ways. They may well be right, if the current trends in teacher education endure.

The stand taken in this paper is currently unpopular in that it laments the attempt to put intellectual endeavors to sleep in teacher education. The time has arrived to start the pendulum swinging in the opposite direction, away from what may seem at first glance as being practical and towards more intellectual undertakings. The latter may be more practical in the long run. Three relevant questions will be presented and briefly discussed: first, what is meant by "intellectualism;" second, what are some of the reasons for its current neglect in teacher education at the moment; and third, why should we reinstate some of the intellectual activities that have been abandoned.

What is Intellectualism?

Webster's dictionary (2) defines intellectual activities as ones developed and guided by rational thinking and reflection rather than by

emotions and pure experiences. Within the framework of teacher education a more intellectual orientation will mean more time spent in dealing with ideas. It would mean trying to comprehend analyze and synthesize concepts, constructs, and theories relevant to educational processes. It would mean more time spent on identifying relevant research and helping students learn how to intelligently interpret and evaluate it. It should also mean exploring the implications of theories and research and their contributions to more effective classroom practices. This should help the student build the necessary bridge between theories and concepts on one hand and classroom activities on the other.

This type of intellectual endeavor should be found not only in Philosophical, Psychological and Sociological Foundations classes but also in classes providing instruction in more specific areas such as reading, curriculum, and methods which are often approached almost completely with a practical cookbook approach.

What are Some of the Reasons for the Move Away From Intellectualism?

At least to some extent, the trend against intellectualism in teacher training reflects a certain amount of distrust of intellectuals in American society. 'Egg heads' are seen as people with irrelevant training and irrelevant ideas that make them big on words and small on actions. In short, the intellectually trained are often seen as impractical incompetents who cannot function effectively in the real world. We have only to look at the importance and impact of ideas and originators of ideas in the past on our daily lives today to realize that lack of practicality and effectiveness was not one of their shortcomings (e.g. Dewey, Lincoln). Dr. Henry Kissinger (without evaluating his accomplishments) may well serve as a prime example of a present day practical, active, and forceful 'egg head,' and he

is not the only one around (e.g. Piaget, Skinner).

Another possible important reason for the neglect of intellectualism may lie in the nature of what has often been labeled as an intellectually oriented class in teacher education in the past. The label "intellectual" was often attached to classes where ancient theories were taught mechanically and without insight, using ancient methods and leading the students nowhere. This type of classes helped sustain the myth that intellectual activities and the content they may deal with are by definition boring, impractical and irrelevant. The trend has been, justifiably so, to discard them as being unnecessary, much as the teaching of Latin has been discarded in most secondary schools as not really needed to 'sharpen the mind.' The trouble is that intellectualism was incorrectly identified with such classes and hence was discarded for reasons that were really irrelevant to intellectual pursuits altogether. Dry, mechanical and unimaginative 'theory' classes were and still are anything but intellectually oriented. They certainly do not provide the student with the opportunity to deal with ideas, struggle with them and try to find what they can contribute to his goals. These are the classes that have been often identified with intellectualism but, intellectual training is a different ball game altogether: by definition it must be stimulating, thought provoking, and freeing. It must be the development of the ability to deal with ideas. It would not be boring because theories and concepts as well as research are fun and exciting; that is, if you preserve their essence and do not kill them by drying them up. The type of intellectualism discussed here is the real, lively one, not the dead imposter mascarading as intellectualism in dusty lectures.

To summarize, it seems that intellectual endeavors have been condemned in many schools of education as a result of mistaken identity.

Why Do We Need to Revive Some Concern for Intellectualism?

Before a number of reasons are presented and discussed to justify the need for more intellectualism in teacher education, it should be pointed out that this is not intended to advocate the elimination of field-based experiences and practical training for prospective teachers. Rather this suggests the existence of a growing need to find a new balance between these two extremes of a continuum.

1. Much field-based and practically oriented training may result in a skill-oriented, cookbook approach to teaching. The more or less 'natural' experiences in the field do provide the student teacher with 'tips' and practical ideas for specific situations as do actual strategies when taught as formuli. Such experiences, however, usually offer little opportunity for the student to gain any real insight and understanding into factors contributing to and controlling the processes that are unfolding in front of him. Without the benefit of theoretical, conceptual considerations, we are helping to create a future teacher who is like a skilled artisan, one that can apply formuli easily and well, but who lacks the intellectual skills and the knowledge necessary for flexibility of action and problem solving. We rob the teacher of the opportunity to develop his ability to solve new problems and/or create new solutions to old ones.

Intellectual inquiry into the underlying factors influencing the complicated human interaction in the classroom, and awareness of alternative theoretical viewpoints, will allow the student teacher to consider

situations and possible solutions from more than one point of view. Furthermore, having more degrees of freedom available to him, will allow the future teacher to make more intelligent decisions. Contrary to specific-stretegies training, intellectual training frees the future teacher from some of the limits of the present and gives him a better chance to meet future challenges yet unforeseen in the present.

Teachers have been striving to become professionals because professionalism impiies (among other things) the ability to perform more intelligently and more effectively in varied situations. If these aspects of professionalism are indeed among our goals, intellectual training is absolutely necessary. It is undesirable for a doctor to prescribe a drug the effectiveness of which he does not really understand. Indeed when this happens (because of the imperfect state of the art in medicine) we find reason for alarm and concern and often pay dearly later for unexpected outcomes. Along the same lines, it is undesirable for a teacher to punish a child just because it happens to work on occasion without understanding the possible side effects which the practices may have.

2. When we emphasize indiscriminate field experience in our training programs, we imply that prospective teachers can benefit from being apprenticed to an experienced practicing teacher. We assume therefore that much wisdom can be found in what is currently being practiced in the schools. Sometimes this assumption is reasonable; often it is not. Certainly some of the problems experienced today in the field of education <u>are</u> related (however, not exclusively) to the quality of instruction in the classroom. By increasing opportunities to observe experienced teachers and actually participate in the educational process, and at the same time reducing the

intellectual components of the training, we are creating the perfect situation for the imitation and perpetuation of current practices - some good, but many bad. Thus we help foster less-than-desirable new habits in novices that lack the theoretical and intellectual background to help them reflect on and reconsider their experiences. In contrast, limiting the amount of field experience while controlling the quality of the models involved and increasing the amount of intellectual activities, especially early in training, may contribute to the ability of the student to be a better judge of what he is observing. Hence we place him in a better position to discriminate between less and more desirable practices and to adapt them to his needs.

3. We can hardly agree among ourselves about the desirable outcomes of education in the schools. Still, most of us would agree that the school experience should be stimulating to children and help them learn how to meet intellectual challenges. It is true that we know little about teachers' behavior and characteristics that are likely to promote these behaviors in young students. It does stand to reason, however, that a teacher who is well developed and stimulated intellectually himself, who can think clearly and meet challenges, is more likely to contribute to the development of these characteristics in his students than a teacher who is lacking in these areas. Thus, promoting the intellectual development of prospective teachers and making them better thinkers may well increase the probability of school children developing these desirable abilities.

4. Increasing the emphasis on intellectual endeavors in teacher education may help attract to the profession more students with a superior

intellectual endowment. This expectation is especially reasonable in light of the job market today in general and in teaching specifically. Since jobs in general are not available in abundance, some young people who might have never considered teaching as a vocation, may give the profession a second look. A more intellectually oriented curriculum may eventually convince some of these students that education may be a stimulating thought-provoking area to pursue, contrary to the often prevailing impression of teacher education as consisting mainly of field observations and lesson-plan writing. The scarcity of teaching positions provides schools of education with the opportunity to 'tighten up' and raise the quality of their programs and the level of the requirements for graduation. This may provide a natural selection process, at the end of which we hope to find survivors who are bright and stimulating. A brighter teacher may not necessarily be a good one, but the likelihood that he/she will become a good teacher is larger than that of a less well-endowed person.

5. Among all individuals that are involved in educational decision-making, the teacher alone is in the position to be intimately familiar with both 'practical classroom' and 'theoretical' considerations relevant to the issues. Politicians, administrators and parents may be familiar with one side of this coin but only rarely is any of them familiar with both. Thus the input forthcoming from teachers in making decisions may contain an invaluable contribution to the process. Minimizing the opportunity for teachers to develop intellectually in fields relevant to education may well deprive us of a most important source of information and contribution to sound decision-making in education by limiting the ability of the teacher to contribute mostly 'practical' considerations. To

illustrate, a well-rounded teacher will be keenly aware of the practicality of the adoption of a certain approach to testing and grading, (e.g. how much time it may require) and at the same time be aware of the broader, more far-reaching implications it may have. His contribution to the decision making will provide a synthesis of both types of consideration. A less intellectually aware teacher even when highly skilled, will lack the understanding of the full meaning of the suggested practice and his/her contribution will not have this unique and desirable synthesis of the two types of consideration. These are some of the reasons which should compel us to take a second look at teacher education and reevaluate what we have been doing lately.

Who is Afraid of Intellectualism? We in teacher education are. We have become afraid to require and design activities in which ideas can be pursued. In the name of relevancy and student interest we have often substituted action for thought. It is time we realize that action is not a substitute for thought and that ideas are not necessarily irrelevant or boring.

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(2) Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, G. & C. Merriam Company, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1974.